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**Review: Gerd Hentschel, Jolanta Tambor, István Fekete:
“Das Schlesische und seine Sprecher: Etablierung in der
Gesellschaft, Attitüden, Vitalität der Germanismen / Śląski
lekt i jego użytkownicy: Rozpowszechnienie, postawy
społeczne wobec śląszczyzny, żywotność germanizmów
w lekcie śląskim” (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2022, Seiten 344)¹**

Abstract

This is a review of the monograph by Gerd Hentschel, Jolanta Tambor, István Fekete (“Das Schlesische und seine Sprecher: Etablierung in der Gesellschaft, Attitüden, Vitalität der Germanismen / Śląski lekt i jego użytkownicy: Rozpowszechnienie, postawy społeczne wobec śląszczyzny, żywotność germanizmów w lekcie śląskim”), in which the authors present the linguistic situation of Upper Silesia, establish the frequency of Germanisms and conduct quantitative research (with a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of these analyses). The monograph is an important substantive voice in the discussion on the status of the Silesian language.

Keywords: Silesian regional language; German language; Germanisms in Silesian regional language; quantitative research

The book was published in two language versions: German and Polish. The text is supplemented with an electronic resource entitled *Słownik frekwencyjny niemieckich zapożyczeń leksykalnych we współczesnym lekcie śląskim* [Frequency dictionary of German lexical borrowings in the contemporary Silesian lect], published on the webpage of the Carl von Ossietzki University of Oldenburg (Hentschel et al., 2021). This review remarks upon the Polish-language version of the text.

The authors address their monograph to a large group of recipients, including those who do not belong to academic circles. The study employs quantitative analyses, which could potentially make the text difficult to understand for those not acquainted with quantitative linguistics. However, the book is written in a manner which makes it accessible to the general public. Over recent years, a debate has been taking place in Poland on the legal ramifications of embracing Silesian as a regional language. This has been discussed in the academic, media and political spheres.

¹ Gerd Hentschel, Jolanta Tambor, István Fekete. “The Silesian lect and its users: Its spread, social stances towards it and the sustainability of Germanisms in the Silesian lect. / The Silesian lect and its users: Its spread, social stances towards it and the sustainability of Germanisms in the Silesian lect” (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2022, pp. 344).

Many opinions on the matter are based on emotions and personal projections, rather than relying on academic studies. This especially concerns the relationship between Silesian and German languages. Does Silesian contain a sufficient number of Germanisms to be viewed as a hybrid of Polish and German?² This question is asked by a large number of people in both Poland and Germany. Answers to questions such as this can be found in this substantive and ideologically unbiased book by Gerd Hentschel, Jolanta Tambor and István Fekete.

The monograph is divided into 6 chapters: 1. Introduction: Research subject and aims; 2. Methodology; 3. Analysis I. The users; 4. Analysis II. The presence of the codes and their sociobiographical conditioning; 5. Analysis III. Germanisms; 6. Conclusions and further research. The final section of the book also comes with a works cited section and an appendix. The authors further indicate that their studies were concerned only with Upper Silesia.

So as to avoid any ideological ties, the authors of the Polish text use the term *lekt śląski* [Silesian lect]. In their other text, they explain the reasoning behind using this particular phrase:

The term *etnolekt* [ethnolect] (used interchangeably with *lekt*) is the only possible expression that can be deemed neutral in the context of the ongoing heated debates; all the other existing possibilities, such as *śląszczyzna* or *mowa śląska* [Silesian speech], *gwarą śląską* [Silesian vernacular], *dialekt śląski* [Silesian dialect] and *język śląski* [Silesian language] carry unfavourable political and social connotations. One side of the debate might consider them offensive or view them as unacceptable misuses. (Hentschel et al., 2019)

The reviewed book indicates that the term is a “successor and a replacement for the word ‘vernacular’, which was until recently referred to as ‘Wasserpölnisch’ in the German context” (Hentschel et al., 2022, p. 171). This description may indicate that in terms of the meaning of the word itself, a lect is more akin to a vernacular than to a language. Maciej Mętrak notes that “in the academic context, the term is used to describe the varieties whose status is under debate, giving this term certain connotations. Intuitively, it is understood as an intermediate stage between a dialect and a language (and not as a general concept that mixes up these two notions)” (Mętrak, 2021, p. 208). I agree with Mętrak (2021, p. 209) that the term *język kolateralny* [collateral language] would be an adequate way of describing Silesian; the term itself was introduced into Polish linguistics by Wicherkiewicz (2014). Collateral language communities are endogenous and autochthonic; they undergo historical development in parallel with the dominant language; they retain strong regional identity related to a territory that is peripheral to the dominant language; they do not emphasise national factors; they experience shifts in prestige, status and the contexts of the applicable use of the language over the centuries; they experience standardisation and normalisation processes; and they have taken actions towards revitalising the language in more recent years (Wicherkiewicz, 2014, pp. 89–91).

The monograph focuses on Germanisms, which are defined as “words of German origin,” i.e. German lexemes adjusted to Silesian, such as *bigiel*, adapted from the German word *Bügel*. The study does not consider calques such as *kosz na pranie* [laundry basket], from the German *Waschkorb*, or syntactic constructions such as *Ślązacy widzą pieniądze na ulicy leżeć* [Silesians see money lying in the street], from the German *Schlesier sehen das Geld auf der Straße liegen*.³

The study of the longevity of Germanisms considers the sociodemographic and sociobiographical contexts. The duality of the description is reflected in the title of the monograph, which points to two entities: ‘lect’ and ‘its users’. The authors use the term *użytkownik* [user], which is broadly accepted in Polish sociolinguistics. I believe that a better choice of words here would be *mówca*

² The monograph refers to the case of a Polish Studies scholar from Katowice, Antonina Grybosiowa (1998, p. 42). In the late 1950s and early 1960s, after having finished her studies and worked at the Jagiellonian University for a short period of time, Grybosiowa decided to continue her academic career in Katowice. Reportedly, she was unable to understand everyday language due to the large quantity of Germanisms (Hentschel et al., 2022, p. 172).

³ The description of various constructions of German origin can be found in the monograph by Tambor (2011).

[speaker], an equivalent to the German term *Sprecher*, which is used in the German version of the monograph. The extralinguistic factors that affect the longevity of Germanisms include the age and education of the speakers, their jobs, their descent from different regions, their knowledge and ability to speak German, and their attitude towards the emancipative ambitions of the Silesian language and Silesian identity. The authors aim to create a well-founded sociobiographical description of the speakers of Silesian.

The study applied the quantitative method of the subjective frequency of words, which is understood as an approximated evaluation of word use frequency in a language made by language users. The recurring uses are confirmed through statistical methods that utilise questionnaires; research participants are provided with a graded scale that begins with a maximum value (i.e., always) and ends with a minimum value (i.e., never). There are at least two grades separating ‘minimum’ and ‘maximum’ values. The research aims to transform the subjective assessments made by the speakers within the questionnaires into objective frequencies. Measuring objective frequencies is only possible for large corpora, which ultimately excludes Silesian. For that reason, the authors resorted to assessing the subjective frequency by surveying a large number of individuals, ensuring they would vary in social and demographic terms; this is indeed the only means of examining the number of occurrences of Germanisms. The study encompasses a large number of words: 700 lexical items were selected from two sources: a glossary of the volume *Ślázky nie gęsi* (Szoltysek, 2010) and the Internet dictionary *Slownik slonski* (n.d.; <http://www.slownikslaski.pl/>). The participant count is also large, amounting to 2000 respondents. The baseline criterion for one to be accepted as a participant was a declaration stating that they used Silesian on a regular basis. The survey of word use frequencies was supplemented by the sociographical details of the speakers, especially the frequency of their use of Silesian, Polish and German, as well as their views and hopes regarding the autonomy of the Silesian language. The sociobiographical questionnaire contained questions addressing all these issues.

The research question of the monograph is phrased as follows: “To what extent are the Germanisms, in their described meaning, still actively used in the Silesian lect, i.e., are they still present in speech?” (Hentschel et al., 2022, p. 172). The authors of the monograph indicate that “until World War II (and certainly afterwards, too), the majority of Silesian speakers were bilingual, i.e., they could speak German fairly well and fluently, understood it and were used to communicating in that language” (Hentschel et al., 2022, p. 173). As a result,

in the mixed speech environment, it is difficult to discern the phenomena of systemic mixing and spontaneous mixing” It is impossible to tell if a particular Germanism functions in the Silesian linguistic system or occurs spontaneously in the speech of a bilingual individual. Hence, during the study it was necessary to establish the degree of multilingualism among the speakers and the proportions of the particular language codes: Silesian, Polish and German. One of the formulated hypotheses states that ‘the endurance of Germanisms in Silesian lect depends on the ‘strength’ of German language among the particular speakers, i.e., how well acquainted the speakers are with German and how often they use it’. (Hentschel et al., 2022, pp. 203–204)

It is also worth noting the fact that about 200 respondents did not provide any answer to the question about the presence of German in public life. The authors emphasise that this figure is quite high in comparison to the missing answers for the question’s counterparts considering Silesian and Polish. “One might stipulate that at least some of the respondents were not willing to admit knowing or using German” (Hentschel et al., 2022). This example shows that the survey results might be affected by the current political situation and that they should be treated with caution. The response regarding the importance of German in Upper Silesia could have been extended into a qualitative study: in-depth interviews focused on the biographies of the speakers. This would have, however, required a significant amount of time and was not a part of the study conducted for the purposes of this monograph. The responses to the survey indicated that about 2/3 of the respondents had no interaction with German. The vast majority of the respondents indicated that

multilingualism is not an important factor in how often Germanisms are used. The common use of particular Germanisms is hence unrelated to spontaneous code-switching.

The monograph provides a reliable insight into the current linguistic condition of Upper Silesia, especially regarding the diglossic relationship between Polish and Silesian. The debate over the status of the Silesian language also benefits from the findings regarding the expectations and attitudes of Silesians. The authors present their conclusions in the following way: “In general, no visible opposition has been found towards Polish language or identity, yet Silesian society visibly shows the need to retain and reinforce its own idiomaticity in the form it has today” (Hentschel et al., 2022, p. 297).

In my view, the quantitative methods used to calculate the subjective word frequencies brought unexpected results. The assessment of the frequency of Germanism shows the polarity of the data points, with many responses concentrated at the extreme values. This shows that the speakers have a strong tendency to declare either the highest or the lowest frequency of lexeme use. Instead of using mean values to analyse the data, the researchers examined the median. This enabled them to create a general “frequency dictionary” of the tested Germanisms for both the entire studied area and for particular Upper Silesian regions (Hentschel et al., 2022, p. 299). Germanisms were categorised into groups based on how often they would occur. When using the frequency dictionary, one should keep in mind that the frequency itself was established based on statistical methods. A different insight can be attained through studying idiolects, as these can vary significantly in terms of the frequency of Germanism use. More Germanisms occur among speakers from the oldest generation, as they were exposed to German more often. A spoken corpus of Silesian could certainly allow researchers to provide a more comprehensive insight into the issue, especially if it were to consider regional and generational variances. The authors warn that “the results do not allow us to draw conclusions regarding the overall distribution of the Silesian lect or Germanisms in Upper Silesia. The presented results ‘only’ tell the reader a few things about the speakers who declare the use of the Silesian lect, and as a result, the overall range of Germanisms in contemporary Silesian lect among the Silesians” (Hentschel et al., 2022, p. 192).

The monograph’s strengths go beyond presenting the linguistic context in Upper Silesia or establishing the frequency of Germanism use. Importantly, the study also presents the overall quantitative research process and discusses the strengths and weaknesses thereof. Hence, the book should certainly be of use to not only those interested in Upper Silesia, but also to sociolinguists who conduct studies in other regions. The monograph is an important and substantive contribution to the debate on the status of Silesian. The authors hope that the results of their studies “will give the Silesian lect a better chance to become codified, including its lexis; and that the Silesian lect will find the support of the Polish state and all politically-motivated decisions in Silesia and in Poland will be made with consideration.”


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